

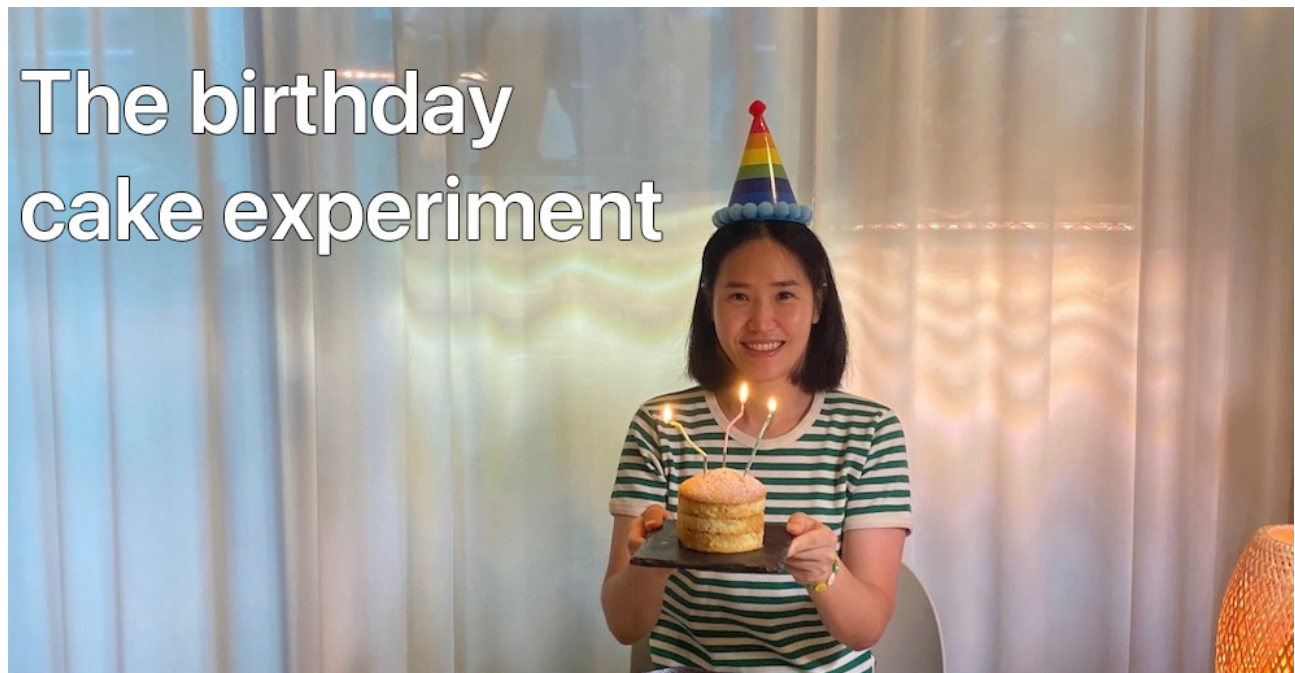
# The birthday cake experiment

## Episode description

In this week's bonus episode, Andrew shares a story about celebrating his wife's birthday and baking her a cake. Plus in the vocabulary lesson, he teaches you how to use a common idiomatic expression: **to have your work cut out for you**.

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Note: The transcript has been edited for clarity.

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**Andrew:** Hey there, everyone, my name is Andrew and you're listening to the Culips English Podcast. It's great to have you here for a study session with me. If this is your first time listening to Culips, welcome aboard. I am a long-term English teacher, who's originally from Canada, but now I'm based out of South Korea. And here at the Culips English Podcast, my team and I, we create interesting audio lessons for intermediate and advanced English learners that are designed to help you become better at English overall. To improve your speaking, and your listening, and your vocabulary, and your communication skills. Plus, along the way, we like to teach you important cultural information about what life is like in English speaking countries.

Now, we kick off the week each week with a short bonus episode, and that's what you're listening to right now. In each bonus episode, I just share some stories about what's going on in my life and update you about what's new with me. I also teach you one useful vocabulary expression and share some information about how to use that expression in a natural way. So, stay tuned to the end of this episode, so that you don't miss this week's lesson. We made a transcript for this bonus episode today and it's totally free for everyone and makes for a fantastic study resource. You can either follow along with the transcript while you listen, or you could check it out after listening to this episode a few times. There are actually so many different ways that you can study with a transcript, but I'll leave the method that you like to use up to you. And to get the transcript guys, you just need to click on the link that's in the episode description. Or you could just simply visit our website as well, which is [Culips.com](http://Culips.com). [C-U-L-I-P-S.com](http://C-U-L-I-P-S.com).

And of course, for all of our regular episodes, we provide transcripts and full study guides for each one. And in the study guide there are detailed vocabulary explanations and real-world examples. There are quizzes and much, much more. The study guides are available to all Culips Members and are a great way to not only improve your English with us, but also to support the work that we do here at Culips at the same time. So, if you're interested in becoming a Culips member, and learning more details about that, just visit [Culips.com](http://Culips.com).

So, it's time to kick off another new week, guys. It's Monday morning here where I am in Seoul. And I have to say I had a pretty great week last week, looking back on it. And I hope the same is true for you as well. I got up to a lot last week, and I felt like I was pretty

productive with working, and studying Korean my second language, exercising, and relaxing with my family as well, which come to think of it, I guess those are my main priorities in life: working, studying, exercising, and relaxing with my family.

I thought I'd talk about a fun event that happened last week, which was my wife's birthday party. So, on Wednesday last week, my wife celebrated her birthday, she's a year younger than I am. And if you're a regular listener of Culips, you'll remember that when I had my birthday back in May, a few months ago, my wife went all out and threw me a really great birthday party. My wife went all out. If you go all out when you do something, it means you put a lot of effort into doing something, so that's it is successful, the result is successful. So, my wife went all out throwing me this birthday party, she put a lot of effort into it, and the result was great. She made delicious food, she gave me some great gifts, she decorated our house beautifully, it was amazing. And I had a fantastic birthday and my wife made me feel really special.

So last week, then it was my turn, right? It was my wife's birthday. She did such a great job on my last birthday that I felt like I had to do the same for her. Now for those of you who don't know, my wife is Korean. And in Korea, it's tradition to eat a special kind of birthday meal, which is a kind of soup, a seaweed soup called miyeok-guk and there's some seaweed in the soup and also some beef and it's actually really delicious. Maybe if you are from a non-Asian culture, the sound of seaweed soup could sound a little bit creepy. And I can relate to that because when I first came to Korea, just the sound of seaweed soup made me feel a little bit creeped out, but it's honestly very delicious. And I actually made the soup for my wife for her birthday last year. And she said I did a pretty good job. She said it was good and delicious, but she said that she wanted to make the soup on her own this year. I guess she doesn't fully trust my Korean cooking skills yet. Fair enough. Fair enough. I'm trying to learn how to cook Korean food these days, but I'm the first to admit that I'm still a newbie. I'm still a newbie. A newbie is what we call someone who is doing something for the first time or doing something new. A beginner, in other words. The spelling is N-E-W-B-I-E, newbie.

So instead of making my wife seaweed soup, I decided to bake her a birthday cake. And she agreed that this was a good idea. So, I got to work, and I started researching different cake recipes and trying to find a cake that she'd like. Now here's the thing, my wife actually doesn't like cake. She doesn't like cake. But she does like having a cake on her birthday, you know, for blowing out the candles and for taking a photo, that kind of thing. The reason she doesn't like cake is that she says it's too sweet, too buttery, too heavy. And

she also doesn't like cream at all. And a lot of cakes have some kind of cream or whipping cream in the cake or in the icing. So, I had my work cut out for me, even just to try and make a cake that she would enjoy because so many cakes are sweet and have cream inside of them. So, the first step that I needed to do was find a recipe that would be a good fit for the kind of cake that she would enjoy. I ended up deciding on a simple, butter-free vanilla cake. And I decided to use just a very small amount of strawberry jam as a filling instead of icing. Strawberry jam is also very sweet, but it's more of a natural flavor than icing is, I suppose. So, I thought that would be a good idea.

And the next step was to purchase the ingredients and supplies, and I realized that I actually didn't have very many of the supplies, I didn't have a cake pan, and I didn't have many of the ingredients as well. And as you can imagine, it's a bit expensive to buy everything at one time. And of course, I ended up spending more money just to buy the supplies and ingredients than it would have cost me just to buy a cake from the bakery. So, I don't know if you guys have ever run into this issue, but it's a little bit annoying when you make something and you only need to use one cup of flour for the recipe, for example, but you end up needing to buy a two-kilogram bag of flour. Or even worse, what happened to me was I needed to use just a half a cup of sugar for the cake recipe, but I ended up buying a three-kilogram bag because it was just so much cheaper to buy a bigger bag than a little bag that I couldn't justify spending the extra money on just a small amount. So, now I have this huge bag of sugar in my pantry.

Anyways, all of the supplies came, 'cause I ordered them online and they were delivered to me, and then I baked the cake the day of the party. I had never tried making a layered cake before, but it actually turned out pretty well. I made three small and thin cakes and then I just stacked them up to assemble the full cake. In between each layer of the cake, I spread a small amount of strawberry jam. And then since my wife doesn't like icing, I just decorated the top of the cake with a sprinkling, a very light sprinkling of icing sugar or some people call it powdered sugar. Same thing.

For those of you who don't know, icing is what we usually call the super-sweet frosting that is spread on the outside of the cake. It's also what cake makers use to decorate cakes with designs and lettering as well. Anyway, I made one small and simple cake for my wife,

I didn't want to make it too big because I thought there was a real possibility that she wouldn't end up eating very much of it.

After I made her cake, I still had some of that cake batter left over. Batter. Do you know that word? If you know that word, pat yourself on the back because it's not a very common English word. Batter: B-A-T-T-E-R, it's what we call the wet cake mixture that hasn't been baked yet. And really, we could use it for any kind of food where you have to make a wet mixture before cooking it. So, like if you are making pancakes, for example, you could have pancake batter. Or if you are making fish and chips, you could have batter for the fish, you know, you dunk the fish into this wet mixture before you fry the fish. So, any kind of wet mixture that we use when baking or cooking, we can call batter.



So, I had some left-over cake mixture, left-over batter, and I made another cake, and this cake was for me. It was the one that I intended to eat. And I actually still even had some leftover batter after that cake. So, I made a couple of cupcakes also. Now I don't have the same hang-ups that my wife does. I don't have any hang-ups when it comes to eating cake. A Hang-up is like a problem or a worry. So, my wife has this problem with eating sweet food. She doesn't like sweet foods, so she has this hang-up about eating cake. But I don't have that problem at all. I'm not a huge sweet-food fan, but that doesn't stop me from eating it. And I have been known to enjoy a piece of cake or two in my day. So, because sweet food doesn't really bother me, I decided to experiment a little bit and to try making some buttercream icing and icing my cake with it. I watched a few tutorial videos on YouTube, and it looked easy enough. The YouTubers that I watched, all had something that I didn't have though, and that was professional tools. The cake makers in the tutorial videos that I watched all did a really fantastic job at evenly spreading the icing and decorating their cakes in such attractive and beautiful ways, but when I tried to do this myself, it was just a major fail, unfortunately.

I tried my best to copy the awesome designs that I saw online, but I had no luck and my cake just looked pathetic. I'll put a picture in the transcript for you guys, so you can check out and see what I'm talking about. In my mind, I envisioned myself making this really beautiful cake that my wife could take a nice birthday souvenir photo with, but I really just came up short. Have you ever heard that expression before, to come up short? If you come up short, it means that your effort wasn't good enough. Despite trying, you still



weren't able to reach your goal. So, for example, let's say the New York Yankees are your favorite baseball team, OK? And if the Yankees lost one of their games, well then after the game, you could say something like the Yankees came up short today. This means that even though they tried to win the game, they were unsuccessful and lost. So anyway, I really came up short with my cake-icing skills and wasn't able to successfully make a beautiful looking cake.



The good news, however, is that the cake that I made for my wife, her cake, it actually looked good enough. And even my ugly cake and her cake, they both tasted delicious. So, in the taste category, I'm going to consider the birthday cake experiment a success. So, on the evening of my wife's birthday, we had a delicious meal. We had a nice birthday party, listened to some music, celebrated, just the two of us, plus our dog Pinky. It was a fun time. My wife was happy with the meal, with the gifts that I gave her, and most importantly, the cakes as well. So yay, another success.

The next birthday coming up in my family is my mom's birthday, which is in August, and I'll actually be back in Canada visiting my family during my mom's birthday, so I'm expecting that we'll throw a party for her too, but I'm positive I won't be making her any seaweed soup. And I think this time, I'll leave the cake baking up to the professionals and just buy her a cake from a bakery.

Guys, I've got a big announcement to make this Tuesday, July 26th, at 7:30pm, Korean Standard Time, we're having a live stream event for all Culips Members. If you're a Culips member, then all you have to do is log in to your account and you can participate. It's going to be a great time. We'll be spending about an hour or so hanging out and practicing English together. So, I really hope many of our members will come and participate, and I can't wait to spend some time with you all then.

In terms of what's new for us here at Culips, well, we recently released a Real Talk episode last week. And in that lesson, Kassy, my cohost and I, we teach you some practical English expressions that you can use when visiting a flower shop and ordering flowers using English, so be sure to check that episode out. And then a little later this week, we'll be releasing a brand-new Simplified Speech episode, where I'm joined again by Kassy. And we'll have a wonderful conversation about international days that are celebrated in the summer. You may be wondering what that episode is all about, but no spoiler, you'll have to tune in and listen to it yourself. So, keep your ears and your eyes open for that episode when it is released a little later on this week.

And now it's time for this week's vocabulary lesson. Before I wrap up this episode, I want to teach you a common English expression that native speakers use all the time. It's a great one to add to your vocabulary for improving both your listening and your speaking. It is: to have your work cut out for you, to have your work cut out for you. Did you hear when I said it earlier in this episode? Why don't we rewind, go back, and take another couple of listens to when I said it a little bit earlier.

The reason she doesn't like cake is that she says it's too sweet, too buttery, too heavy. And she also doesn't like cream at all. And a lot of cakes have some kind of cream or whipping cream in the cake or in the icing. So, I had my work cut out for me...

OK, so the expression that we're learning about is: to have your work cut out for you. And it's a bit of a long one: to have your work cut out for you. And we just heard about when I was saying that I had my work cut out for me when trying to bake a cake for my wife, who is a person who doesn't like cake. So, what does it mean? Well, when you have your work cut out for you, it means that the job, or the work, or the task that you have to do is going to be very difficult and challenging, if not impossible to do. I've prepared some example sentences using this expression that will explain it more clearly and help us to understand it more deeply. So, let's take a listen to those example sentences now.

### **Example sentence number one.**

We're going to have our work cut out for us if we want to finish this report by the end of the day.

Let's break this example sentence down. In that sentence, the speaker says, "we're going to have our work cut out for us if we want to finish this report by the end of the day." That

means that the speaker of that sentence thinks that he and his coworkers will not be able to finish the report by the end of the day. He's saying that it seems like it's impossible, that there is no way they will finish unless they really, really, really work hard to try and get it done by the end of the day, but it doesn't seem likely that that's possible.

## **Example sentence number two.**

Anyone can learn English, but if you try to learn English fluently in only three months, you're going to have your work cut out for you.

Let's break this example sentence down. In that example sentence, we heard the speaker say that if you try to learn English to fluency in three months, you're going to have your work cut out for you. In other words, the speaker is saying that he thinks it's impossible or practically impossible to learn English to fluency in only three months. And I'm sure that all of you listeners out there can agree that this is pretty much impossible, right? Can you learn some English in three months? Yes, of course. Can you learn it to fluency? No, not really. You're going to need more time than three months for that.

**Example sentence number three.** Charlie told me he wants to lose 10 kilograms before we go to the beach on the weekend. He sure has his work cut out for him.

Let's break that example down. So, the speaker says that his friend Charlie wants to lose 10 kilograms before the weekend. Now, losing weight is one of those things that is notoriously, famously, difficult to do, right? So, 10 kilograms. Is it possible to lose 10 kilograms? Yes. Is it possible to lose 10 kilograms in one week? No, that is not very easy or common to do. So, the speaker of that example, says that his friend has his work cut out for him. That it's almost a practically impossible challenge to try and lose 10 kilograms in one week.

Okay, guys, that's it for this episode. Thank you for making it to the end. And of course, congratulations on completing another English study session with me. This is exactly the kind of thing that you need to do to improve your English fluency. So please keep up the good work. And good luck with your English studies this week. Try to keep this momentum going throughout the week and you'll continue to move closer and closer towards your English goals.



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